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AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION:

Please delete the paragraph beginning at page 6, line 29 and replace with the following paragraph:

The presently described protocol provides a mechanism for exchanging information between the CE 100 and one or more FEs 110a ~~100a~~, 110b in a network element architecture. In a particular embodiment the protocol is referred to as the FLEX (ForCES Light-weight Extensible) protocol. The FLEX protocol may form a part of the Transport Plugin 30.

Please delete the paragraph beginning at page 7, line 5 and replace with the following new paragraph:

The inventive protocol is a stateless, request-response protocol between the control element 100 and the forwarding elements 110a, 110b in an NE. The protocol is relatively lightweight in terms of both low message parsing overhead and utilization of small message sizes, which may be accomplished by using TLV or compact binary encapsulation for the message or packet payload. In one embodiment, the protocol has a fixed length header that is 8-bytes long followed by a variable length payload, with the messages being 32-bit aligned. An example packet header includes a version field, a flags field, a message type field and a command correlator field. The version field is one byte long and contains the version number of the protocol being used. The flags field is also one byte long and contains various flags that are used in protocol headers. The message type field is two bytes long and defines the message type (e.g., bind request, bind response, etc.). The command correlator field is four bytes long and is

used to distinguish between commands of the same type. The command correlator field

contains a sequence number for the command which is used in order to distinguish between the

response to the commands of the same type. For example, a CE may issue a bind request to a

first FE and a bind request to a second FE. The command correlator field assigns a different

sequence number to each bind request such that the response to the first bind command can be

distinguished from the response to the second bind request.

Please delete the paragraph beginning at page 9, line 1 and replace with the following

paragraph:

In one embodiment, the information exchange between the CE 100 and FE 110a ~~100a~~,

110b using the present protocol includes multiple phases: a binding phase, a capability and

topology discovery phase (also referred to as a capability discovery phase), and a configuration

operation phase.

Please delete the paragraph beginning at page 13, line 19 and replace with the following

paragraph:

Having described preferred embodiments of the mechanism for exchanging information

between a control element and a set of forwarding elements it will now become apparent to those

of ordinary skill in the art that other embodiments incorporating these concepts may be used.

Additionally, the software included as part of the mechanism for exchanging information

between a control element and a set of forwarding elements may be embodied in a computer

program product that includes a computer useable medium. For example, such a computer

usable medium can include a readable memory device, such as a hard drive device, a CD-ROM,

a DVD-ROM, or a computer diskette, having computer readable program code segments stored

thereon. ~~The computer readable medium can also include a communications link, either optical,~~

~~wired, or wireless, having program code segments carried thereon as digital or analog signals.~~

Accordingly, it is submitted that that the mechanism for exchanging information between a

control element and a set of forwarding elements should not be limited to the described

embodiments but rather should be limited only by the spirit and scope of the appended claims.